Becoming a Hero: 
*Persona 5’s Video Game Narrative and Its Connection to Social Justice and the Defeat of Corruption*

by Cassandra Martinez 
Linfield College 
Communication Arts Program
Questions:
➤ How do video games create a place of awareness and connection to relatable societal problems and invoke a sense of seeking justice?
➤ What elements in the video game’s characters, setting designs, music, dialogue presentation, and mechanics help create a strong narrative?

Purpose:
➤ The purpose of this study was to analyze the game’s narrative structure to determine how the story impacts the player as it connects to realistic problems of society and the player’s need to seek justice.
SIGNIFICANCE

➤ More than 155 million people in the U.S. play video games. (Campbell)

➤ Video games increasingly depict social justice issues and other important social topics.

➤ Games can be used to educate players about social justice issues and actions beyond the virtual world, that is, in “real life.”
METHOD: FISHER’S NARRATIVE CRITICISM

➤ Narrative Paradigm, according to Walter Fisher = “A theoretical framework that views narrative as the basis of all human communication” (qtd. in Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks 307)

➤ Narrative or narration = “symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them” (Fisher qtd. in Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks 305).

➤ Narrative criticism allows one to see the “essence of human nature” (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks 303)
ELEMENTS IN A NARRATIVE

➤ Narratives

➤ include a world of the mind (setting)

➤ populate that world with intelligent agents (characters)

➤ who participate in actions and happenings (events, plot)

➤ which cause global changes in the narrative world

➤ Narrative is thus "a mental representation of causally connected states and events that captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members.”

(Foss 320).
VIDEO GAME STATS

As of 2017: (Lofgren)

➤ 59% of Gamers are Male
➤ 41-42% of Gamers are Female
➤ PC: 56%
➤ Game console: 53%
➤ The average age of gamers: 35
➤ The average number of years gamers have been playing: 13
➤ 60% of video game purchasers are men
➤ 40% of video game purchasers are women
➤ In 2015, 155 million Americans played video games. This number has remained steady. (Campbell)
Persona 5

➤ RPG (Role-Playing Game) Video game or JRPG

➤ World Wide Release: April 4, 2017

➤ Won Best Role Playing Game at the 2017 The Game Awards (Dec. 7, 2017)

➤ “Persona 5 is a game about the internal and external conflicts of a group of troubled high school students - the protagonist and a collection of compatriots he meets in the game's story - who live dual lives as Phantom Thieves. They have the typically ordinary day-to-day of a Tokyo high schooler: attending class, after-school activities, and part-time jobs. But they also undertake fantastical adventures by using otherworldly powers to enter the hearts of people. Their power comes from the Persona, the Jungian concept of the ‘self’; the game's heroes realize that society forces people to wear masks to protect their inner vulnerabilities, and by literally ripping off their protective mask and confronting their inner selves do the heroes awaken their inner power, and using it to help those in need. Ultimately, the group of Phantom Thieves seeks to change their day-to-day world to match their perception and see through the masks modern society wears.” (Playstation)
Shibuya: One of many places the main protagonist can go to build up skills and meet confidants.

ANALYSIS - SETTING

Palace: Where the heroes can change the cognitive state of the antagonist (McCarthy)

(Summers)
Analysis - Characters

Main Protagonist
Player's Avatar
Third Person Perspective

Main Antagonist
The reason why main protagonist seeks justice

Confidants:
- Friends of the Main Protagonist
- Help level up stats of the Protagonist
  - Goldfarb
  - Sandikun
  - Saif
Events/Plot

- The protagonist is accused of a crime he didn’t commit and is sent away to Tokyo to serve his probation.
- He meets various people who also were unjustly accused.
- He soon discovers an alternate realm that grants his friends and him powers called Personas to battle against the monsters and antagonist in palaces.
- He creates the group called “The Phantom Thieves.”
- They are tasked to steal the hearts of corrupted individuals and make them admit their crimes in order to balance society.
- The main protagonist will continue to do this until he finds the one who falsely accused him and ruined his life.
- Whatever choice the player makes will alter the story to create either a good or bad ending.
CONCLUSION

➤ Narratives in video games benefit the player(s) who play them by engaging them in a complex story about social justice.

➤ The narrative is the driving force of what makes the game not only entertaining, but also memorable to the players.

➤ Relating to social justice, the narrative becomes more realistic and engaging to the player and adds more in-depth thoughts about the meaning of the video game’s concept.

➤ Video games are more than entertainment.

➤ Video games provide an alternate way of telling stories.

➤ Video games provide the player an interactive way to engage with the story.
REFERENCES


